

**Dear Akron,**

As we navigate this difficult period during and after the grand jury decides whether charges will be brought against the eight police officers who killed Jayland Walker last summer, I want to take a moment to share my thoughts with you on this deeply emotional series of events which have great potential to divide us.

When we lost Jayland, our community lost a son. A brother. A friend. A kind soul whose life, memory, and tragic death will forever be imprinted in the fabric of this community.

We watched speechless as the body camera footage of what took place on June 27<sup>th</sup> replayed on our TVs. People are angry, frustrated, scared, and uncertain, all understandably so. The tension in our community is palpable. You can see it in the faces of our children, and you hear it in the voices of our elders. You can almost grab it out of the air. If I could, I would bury it and replace it with the hope I see for our future.

In the face of unspeakable tragedy, Jayland's family has shown us incredible grace. Jayland's mother Pamela and his sister Jada have asked us to keep his memory lifted no matter what happens, and I take up that mantle on behalf of our community because I am fully confident that not only will Jayland's memory be lifted, but that his memory will be a blessing. They've asked us to demand accountability and change. I am fully confident our community, our city, will be the catalyst for the necessary change we are all so desperately seeking.

Jayland's family joined me in Washington, D.C., where they lobbied to ensure Justice for Jayland and advocated for accountability and public safety for other sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters across the country. Their grace in the face of tragedy encourages me to demand more from my colleagues and more for our communities because you deserve it.

Most importantly, Jayland's family reminds us that Akron is our home. This is where we live, where we work, and where we send our children to school. The United States Constitution guarantees every person in this county has the freedom to protest their government peacefully without retribution. Our right to protest is critical to the functioning of our democracy. It holds those in power accountable and sparks change when the laws on the books are not doing enough to protect our communities. It's how elected officials know how to best serve the citizens who have entrusted us to carry out the functions of government. Your voice — our communities' collective voice — is the only way we can make the change we're hoping for and fighting for permanent.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "We must learn to live together as brothers (or sisters) or perish together as fools." The safety and security of our neighborhoods requires mutual trust between the community and the law enforcement who have taken an oath to protect and serve. The duty to protect our community is on all of us. We must cherish this precious gift we call home and guard its future and prosperity even when times are hard.

While we navigate our collective uncertainty around what happens next and/or what the grand jury will decide, one thing is certain — I will be here.

Akron is my home. I was born here. Raised here. Got married here. And it's where I am proud to represent as the Congresswoman for Ohio's 13<sup>th</sup> District.

My office is downtown, and that's where it will remain. It has always been my commitment to ensure your government is available and accessible to you. We will not run away from the challenges ahead of us. We are going to face them, together. Because we are the birthplace of

champions. The community I've called home will face any obstacle that comes our way with honesty, clarity, and love.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emilia Strong Sykes', with a stylized, flowing script.

Emilia Strong Sykes  
Member of Congress  
13<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Ohio

